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Russians Seen Able to Replace Missiles Under Weakened Provisions of SALT II

SOVIETS COULD USE NEW WEAPONS

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Administration efforts to restrict Soviet missile improvements have been so whittled down in SALT II negotiations that the Soviets will be able to replace their missile force with new weapons, according to official sources.

This is viewed by the sources, some of them SALT critics, as detracting significantly from administration claims that the new strategic arms limitations treaty will constrain not only the quantity but the quality of nuclear weapons.

These sources say the constraints emerging from the negotiations are not sufficient to prevent the Soviet deployment of new generations of improved missiles, so long as they fit within the general limits of existing ones.

The sources familiar with SALT negotiations are unwilling to become publicly involved in a dispute on the subject, however, because of the White House's major political investment in promoting the advantages of the new treaty and playing down any shortcomings. It claims that the agreement prevents significant improvements in further missiles.

A MAJOR administration goal had been to get the Soviet Union to match the U.S. decision to quit building successive generations of land-based missiles. The new treaty is intended to achieve that, but its success is now uncertain.

The administration's campaign to sell SALT II featured major speeches last week by Defense Secretary Harold Brown and National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Brzezinski said a major accomplishment of SALT II is that it "limits each side to developing and deploying one completely new ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) before 1985." Since the treaty is to expire Dec. 31, 1985, he meant before 1986.

"This provision will inhibit the qualitative expansion of the arms race," Brzezinski said. He has been emphasizing for two years the great importance of restricting the improvement of missile quality so that resources diverted from larger quantities of them would not be used to make the limited numbers more deadly.

BROWN SAID the treaty will "limit each side to one new ICBM type, with a maximum of 10 re-entry vehicles." Each vehicle is a separately targeted nuclear warhead that is tossed out by the intercontinental "bus" as it hurtles toward earth.

By specifying a new "type," Brown qualified the treaty restriction in a significant way that has not been publicly spelled out.

In fact, sources say, there is no limitation to developing and deploying new missiles within the limits of the treaty.

This is worrying some officials in the intelligence community who are responsible for assessing future prospects for the Soviet-American strategic balance. It is not clear, however, just what might be the long-term effects on the balance of the Soviets' being able to develop completely new ICBMs within the limits.

When it took over the long-running SALT negotiations two years ago, the Carter administration tried to win Soviet agreement to a number of parameters intended to block any replacement of existing, land-based, intercontinental missiles beyond one agreed new missile for each side.

THERE IS NO restriction on new submarine-launched intercontinental missiles except limiting them to 14 re-entry vehicles apiece.

The United States has not built a new land-based intercontinental missile since the Minuteman was started some two decades ago. During that period, the Soviet Union has developed two new generations of missiles and is now working on another.

The tentative treaty now specifies that each country will be permitted to flight-test and deploy one "new type" ICBM smaller than the big Soviet SS-18. But the Soviets have consistently refused to accept tight limitations on their test launchings — and, therefore, on what might be deployed as a result of testing.

The result in negotiations has been to whittle away the limitations that the United States sought in order to get limits that would freeze existing Soviet missiles to match the U.S. freeze on Minuteman, plus the one exception. The U.S. exception is the MX missile. The administration has agreed to protect it from Soviet attack.

Successive compromise in SALT negotiations have now left limits that will control the dimensions, launch weight and throw-weight of missiles. Launch weight is important because of the amount of fuel carried and therefore range, and throw-weight determines the size and explosive power of warheads.